181 who speak little; there are the choleric people, more liable than others
157 to anger, more spiteful, but also endowed with more energy.

181 Energy is not the chief quality of these people, who are trained by
their leaders to blind and faithful obedience. The tight organization
156 we have described has its unhappy consequences, atrophy of the will and destruction of the spirit of initiative. Such is the price. A Mossi cannot resist those who are more powerful. Flexible and almost cowardly before his superiors, he makes up for it with his inferiors and shows great arrogance and disdain toward those who are weaker.

181 /110/ The Mossi do not exercise their will, and they do not exer-
153 cise their thinking faculty. This is not because they lack intelligence, but because they are not accustomed to thought except when their interests are at stake, at which time some of them demonstrate true intelligence and diplomacy.

The Mossi do not question the why of things. While small children in our country like to argue and often perplex us with their questions, the Mossi never ask themselves, "How can this be? Why is it so and not otherwise?" The first answer that comes to mind satisfies them.

This lack of thought is the cause of their lagging civilization, for is it not true that we move forward unceasingly only because we seek to investigate the cause of everything? It also results in a paucity of ideas. Conversations turn mainly upon women, food, and agriculture during the rainy season. Their sphere of ideas is quite restricted, but it is capable of expansion, for the Mossi may be considered quite intelligent.

539 If proverbs express the wisdom of a people, the Mossi certainly do not lack wisdom and often couch it with great subtlety. Permit us to prove this by quoting a few proverbs, culled in the course of conversations by Fr. Thueux, who kindly conveyed them to us and who gathered explanations, since some of them are real enigmas to our European minds.

1. Kota ningri, ka kot' sen kong'ye.
   Give above you, not below.
   (If you give to someone who is more powerful, you will always get something out of it.)
2. Maokasankaré ñarda kon lo'é naobi taoré.
   No matter how much it may hurry, the heel never catches up with the toes.
   (Who is the hen to sing before the rooster?)

539

15. Sosra sen kaosda, wata ne korg' wenbsego.
When a conversation lingers, the bag is fingered.
(Familiarity breeds contempt.)

16. Pu' pidya, bango luéya.
Full belly, gagged indiscretion.
(Those who need you are discreet).

17. Sad' no' o, yid noa' karga.
A good laugh is better than a chicken leg.
(A warm reception is better than a good meal.)

18. Ned' kon wok' a bâka, ti pemsom yi ye.
You don't cut open your shoulder just for the air to come out.
(Never abandon a friend in need.)

19. Bunbundi ka dod' zalol'n yé.
Those who give their best do not go away empty-handed.
(Work hard, do your best, there is no lack of true wealth.)

181 153 The Mossi likes to talk. Although he has few ideas of his own, if one knows how to make use of his familiar experiences to bring him to a higher level, he follows the reasoning easily, understands quite promptly what is told him, and grasps the train of ideas and even the finer gradations of meaning. In short, he has quite a noteworthy aptitude for assimilation. Often I explained to a chief in broad outline the handling of a gun or the mechanism of a watch or bicycle. If an outsider came by, the naba relayed the explanations to show that he was intelligent and that he had grasped them properly. Indeed, I was often surprised at how well most of them did this.

They like pictures. At first they often hold them upside down, but a few explanations are usually sufficient to make them grasp their meaning. First they recognize familiar things, such as people, horses, dogs, and trees, and they explain them to each other. They come to understand the scene and the reasons for the attitudes of the figures pictured.

181 522 576 /112/ In conversations, when they are not ill at ease, they are lively, merry, and they like to laugh. It is a compliment on their part when they say that someone laughs easily. They are sometimes humorous, they understand innuendoes, but they know how to keep their distance and do not permit themselves any familiarities, even in words, toward their superiors.

181 153 They are very susceptible to teaching. The little slaves raised in Malta learned the French language well, and all those who have met them say that they are quite intelligent. We had children in our school who quicly learned writing, reading, and arithmetic, and who did not forget what they had learned when they got married and had to leave school to work in the fields. Reading remains a pastime to them, and they keep up their knowledge of the French language. We did not notice among them what has so often been pointed out about the little Arabs, who give great promise when young, signs of real intelligence, and who do not live up to this promise when they grow up. The intelligence of the Mossi develops with the years, and this would make it possible to exercise considerable influence over them. 080 Teaching that opens their minds, however, should not cause them to lose their religious sense without contributing anything in its place. Within a short period of time this would bring about the demoralization and downfall of this people who seem capable of rapid progress, and it would be a pity.

538 They like to tell fables, and a volume of Mossi literature could easily be compiled by gathering the historical legends, proverbs, and fables which are to be found among this people. As an example, we shall now recount a few stories we have been told. As in all primitive tales, animals play the role of intelligent actors. The Romaunt of the Rose has long since familiarized us with this kind of literature.

The Bad Vulture and the White Hawk

539 A bald vulture was wandering about the bush. A white hawk came by and said to the vulture, "Why have you nothing to eat?" The vulture replied, "It is true, I have nothing to eat. May God help me find something." The hawk said, "God cannot give people enough food to satisfy their hunger." The vulture answered, "If God does not give me something to eat, I shall not eat."

The white hawk saw a dove alighting on a stick. The hawk swooped down upon her, but the stick pierced his breast and came out behind his head. The vulture came and ate the hawk.

174 traveler himself, between the people of Gotto who were mixed in this
114 affair and the Mossi of Yatenga who made the expedition. Finally, Naba Kango, although he brought great glory /29/ in the eighteenth century to the Mossi dynasty of Yatenga, obviously did not find, at the beginning of his reign, an absolute fragmentation of small countries which he would have gathered under single authority. He doubtless limited himself to restoring a kingdom that had formerly been powerful and centralized, and which he made so again through his personal prestige. In any case, he did not give his name to the Mossi (it is, on the contrary, the Mossi who, in Mungo-Park's description, give him his name), any more than to the capital which he indeed founded and which he called Ouahigouya. All these details are thus false or imaginary, but the principal fact remains and is very interesting. Mungo-Park arrived in Ségou just in time, in 1796, to
● [153] record it before the weak memories of the Mossi and Bambara Negroes would have condemned it to hopeless oblivion. /30/

Chapter 4

The Cult of the Sun Among the Mossi

794 Do the Mossi adore the sun? And is their great god Ouendé partly or wholly a sun god?

Binger was the first to state that the Mossi adored the sun. "They are fetishists," he says (1), "but they have a cult of the sun, which

1. Du Niger au golfe de Guinée
/From the Niger to the Gulf of Guinea/,
Vol. I, p. 492.

still today bears the same name as God; they call it Wouidi."

In turn, Lieutenant Desplagnes, in his Plateau Central Nigérien /Central Nigerian Plateau/ (pp. 275, 276) said in 1907:

"The Hougho-Ouango of Mossi (these priests live in Mossi in the villages of Boujema, Mani, Kondogho, Yolo, Tio) make sacrifices to the sun in order to bind it to the earth, morning and evening, at

10:Hammond E-5 (1954-1956) 1964 FA28 Mossi FA28
Yatenga

indirectly from the good will of his ancestral spirits whose benevolence Ego often invokes.

Ambivalence follows from other characteristics of the relationship. Resentment of Ego's depredations of her husband's property and jealous concern for the inheritance rights of her own children appear to be at least partially balanced by a share of the affection her husband shows for Ego. However, joking in this relationship is asymmetrical. The mother's brother's wife takes the more aggressive role, and from the vehemence of her joking, and the structural nature of the relationship, it appears likely that amity lies less heavily in the balance than hostility. The groups to which the two parties belong are equal in status. Their respective positions within them, of course, are not, and this is reflected in the aforementioned asymmetry. Each party is obviously independent of the authority system of the other.

Joking Between Siblings-in-Law

Siblings-in-law who joke are separated by the rule of sib exogamy observed among the Mossi. Reciprocity is basic to the marriage contract that unites their respective kin groups. Several factors tend to create ambivalence in the relationship. Both kin groups—in particular, the extended families of the two marriage partners—profit from the reciprocal tie established between them, but possible failure on the part of either group to reciprocate adequately, particularly with regard to marriage payments, constitutes a persistent source of potential friction. Moreover, the Mossi observe the levirate. Joking between siblings-in-law who are potential spouses, yet are presently constrained by a prohibition against adultery, has frequently been ascribed the function of reducing tension in a situation of conflict. The kin groups of siblings-in-law are always structurally equivalent because groups occupying significantly different strata in Mossi society do not intermarry. As members of autonomous descent groups the participants are obviously independent of one another.

Joking Between Sibs

Sibs (or lineages) whose members joke with one another are, of course, also separate groups.[2] They are always united by a strong tradition of reciprocal social and economic aid. Ambivalence apparently stems from the conflict between this tradition of reciprocity and actual competing claims to land. The origin of joking relationships between two descent groups is often ascribed to the alleged fact that, when they first arrived in the village, leaders of both falsely claimed to the chief that he and his kinsmen had arrived first, and thus had a prior right to land, and that the members of the other group were their slaves. Despite their jocular allegations, both groups are in fact structurally equal and independent.

Joking Between Age-Sets

Joking between age-sets within an age-grade varies with the generational